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## **Somali refugee perceptions of factors impacting the learning of their children in high schools.**

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SOMALI REFUGEE PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS  
IMPACTING THE LEARNING OF THEIR  
CHILDREN IN HIGH SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Presented

by

MOHAMED FARAH AHMED GOOD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1999

School of Education

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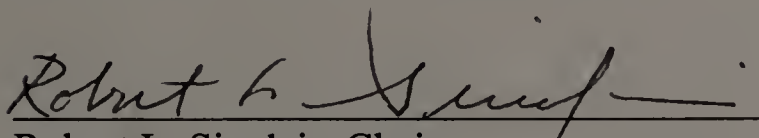
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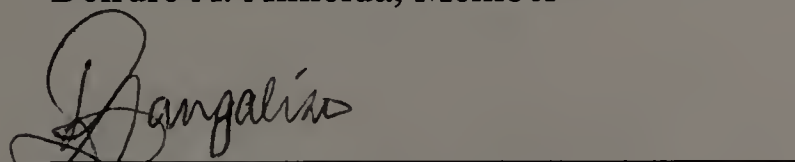
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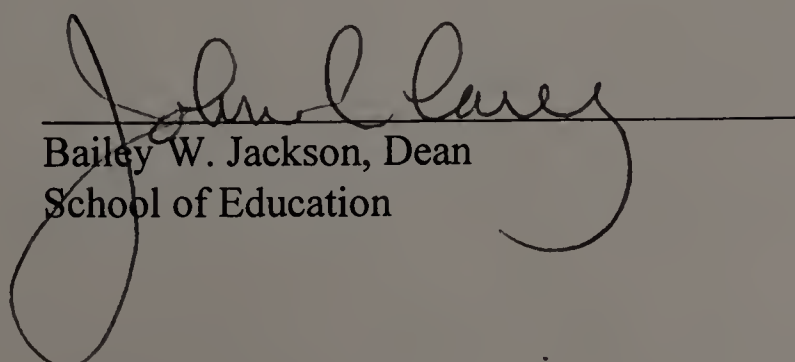
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Abdirashid, Farah, Deqa, and Good also deserve special thanks for their happy smiles which kept me motivated.

## ABSTRACT

### SOMALI REFUGEE PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS IMPACTING THE LEARNING OF THEIR CHILDREN IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Over the last 15 years, approximately 12,000 Somali immigrants and refugees have settled in the capital region of Ottawa-Carleton. According to a study of Somali youth (Ali, 1995), about seventy percent (70%) of the Somalis in Ottawa-Carleton are between 1 and 17 years old. The Ottawa Board of Education reported that in 1993, thirty three percent of all immigrant and refugee students were Somalis.

While schools have been successful in helping a significant portion of these students to succeed in their learning, evidence shows that many are disconnected from productive learning. As establishing constructive connections between the home environment and the school environment is an important and crucial step to improve the educational opportunities for students who are at risk of failure, a study of the parents' perceptions is warranted.

The main purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the Somali parents' perceptions of the school and non-school learning conditions that help or hinder the



education of their children in Ottawa high schools. A survey questionnaire was used to collect the data from a sample of diverse Somali parents. The diversity of the sample is in terms of gender, level of education, employment, marital status, number of years in Canada, and number of children. Specifically, four research questions guided this study:

1. What do Somali Parents consider to be the school and non-school learning conditions that help the education of their children who are succeeding in their learning?
2. What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school conditions that hinder the education of their children who are at risk of failure in learning?
3. What are parents perceptions of the school personnel's willingness to involve immigrant parents in educational decision-making?
4. What recommendations do Somali parents make to improve learning conditions for all children?

Data were drawn from the survey responses of 85 Somali parents whose children attend high schools in Ottawa. Findings indicate that parents are concerned about the lack of diversity and multicultural instructional materials in schools. While parent responses regarding the treatment of their children in schools vary widely, there is a consensus among the parents that guidance counselors are not sensitive to the needs of immigrant students.

Findings also indicated that parents expressed the schools' limited effort and interest in involving immigrant parents in school committees. Lack of effective communication is an other concern raised by parents. Most of participating parents stated that the only time they get a call from school is when there is a problem. Some expressed the schools unwillingness to communicate with parents even when a parent takes the initiative and visits the school of his or her child.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study. It describes the statement of the problem and purpose of the study. The definition of key terms, significance, and delimitations of the study are also discussed.

#### Statement of the Problem

Canada has been a multicultural nation since its beginnings, given the diversity amongst its native peoples. The first European settlers came to Canada for different reasons. Some were fleeing religious and political persecutions, while others were seeking a better life. These settlers, who were mainly from Britain and France, became the dominant ethnocultural groups within the Canadian mosaic.

After the confederation, immigration policies which favored European immigrants and refugees were regulated. From the 1900s to 1967 most of the immigrants and refugees coming to Canada were from western Europe. This was due to Canada's policies of racial discrimination regarding those admitted as immigrants until 1967 (The Social Planning Council of Ottawa - Carleton, 1986).

Since Canada is largely a nation of immigrants, the majority of Canadians embrace new ethnic groups even as they worry about the perceived economic, social, cultural, and educational challenges recent arrivals may pose. Heartfelt humanitarian values encouraged the federal government to revisit its immigration laws and revoke the discriminatory aspects of the system, substituting them with neutral factors.

In 1967, the federal government finally passed legislation that dropped race as a criterion for admission and substituted for it a point system based on neutral factors such as: age, education, arranged employment, occupational demand, occupational skills, knowledge of English and French languages, and having relatives in Canada. Since then, immigrants from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and South America found it possible to emigrate to Canada. For the last two decades, the number of immigrants and refugees entering Canada increased from about 130,000 per year in 1980s to more than 200,000 per year in the 1990s. However, in the same time period emigration from Europe slowly declined.

In addition to the increase in numbers, there has been a shift in the culture as people brought in values from their countries of origin. This shift was mainly from the traditional western European culture to cultures from other parts of the world, particularly Africa and Asia, which accounted for approximately forty percent(40%) of Canada's immigration by the late 1980s (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1989). Among the recent and non-traditional refugees who arrived in Canada are the Somalis.

Most Somalis came to Canada to seek refugee status from within Canada. According to a study conducted by the Center for Refugee studies, York University, refugee claims by Somalis rose from 31 in 1985 to 3505 within the first six month of 1991(Opuko-Dapaah, E, 1995). Also, the number of Somali refugees in Ottawa-Carleton rose from several hundred in 1986 to approximately twelve thousand (12,000) in 1993.

As a result of this influx, there has been a steady increase in student registration in the Ottawa Board of Education. In 1993 the Board reported that about twenty five

students, the equivalent of a classroom, are assessed at the Family Welcome Center (an immigrant student educational screening service center) per week. The Board also reported that thirty three percent(33%)of these immigrant and refugee students were Somalis (Ottawa Board of Education, 1993). Other Boards of Education in the capital region reported similar statistics both in the increase of immigrant and refugee students. Educators expressed mixed feelings about the influx of immigrant and refugee students. Theoretically, the mission of public education in a democratic society is the provision of equal and quality education to all children of all families and schools have the responsibility of creating learning environments that promote such an education to all children regardless of their differences (Tyler, 1993).

Schools reflect the communities they serve. Unfortunately, the tension felt in the larger community is what immigrant students experience in public schools. They are the focus of both the heartfelt welcome and the conflicting discussions about immigrants and refugees in general. While schools have been successful in helping a significant number of these students to succeed in their learning, evidence shows that many are disconnected from productive learning. For example, significant numbers of Somali youth are underachieving and fail to complete their high school education(Ali, 1995).

One way of helping students improve their performance is to establish constructive connections between the school and the home environments. Thus, an important and maybe most crucial step towards improving student educational opportunities is to involve their parents. The main purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore parents' perceptions of the factors that positively or negatively affect the learning of Somali high school students in Ottawa.



### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine directions for improving school and non-school learning conditions for Somali immigrant and refugee high school students in Ottawa public schools. First, the study identifies factors that either help or hinder learning of Somali high school students in Ottawa public schools as perceived by their parents.

Second, various ways that the Ottawa Board of Education may involve the parents of Somali high school students in the education of their children are discussed. Third, the Somali parents' perceptions of the importance of home-school collaboration in helping the Somali high school students succeed in their learning is explored.

Further, the recommendations of parents regarding suggestions for improving the school and non-school learning conditions for their children in Ottawa high schools are presented. Specifically, the study was guided by the following four research questions.

1. What do Somali parents consider to be school and non-school conditions that help Somali high school students who are succeeding in their learning?
2. What do Somali parents consider to be school and non-school conditions that hinder the learning of Somali high school students who are at risk of failure in their learning?
3. How important do parents of Somali high school students consider home-school collaboration for helping their children succeed in their learning?

4. What recommendations do Somali parents make for improving school learning conditions for their children in Ottawa high schools?

### Definition of Terms

The definitions below explain specific terms central to this study.

Immigrant: A person who immigrates to a new country or region.

Refugee: A person who flees his or her home or country to seek refuge elsewhere, as in a time of war or because of political or religious persecution.

Parent: A parent refers to a biological or adoptive parent, step-parent, or legal guardian of a child. In the case of Somali community, all members of the extended family are considered to be parents.

Perception: In this study, perceptions are the set of ideas that adults accept as true. These perceptions could be objective or subjective view points on reality.

Students at risk: refers to the students who do not appear to be benefitting from what schools offer and are likely to drop out of school for various reasons.

Learning conditions: Learning conditions include the physical surroundings, emotional climate, academic expectations, and social interactions that foster or hinder a student's learning.

### Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study advances our knowledge about the factors that affect the learning conditions of



immigrant and refugee students by examining the perceptions of the parents of these students.

This study is important for four practical reasons. First, by reviewing the results of the study, school boards could determine constructive ways of creating home-school partnerships that help improve the school and non-school learning conditions for all students. Second, understanding the immigrant parents' perceptions of the factors affecting the education of their children may help the board of education to determine ways of involving parents in the process of improving learning conditions for all students.

Third, this study may be helpful to Canadian teacher education institutions. Simply stated, prospective teachers need to develop a sensitivity to parent viewpoints about the factors that foster or inhibit student learning. The findings of this study may also encourage teachers to establish constructive communication and cooperation with parents so that approaches to helping students learn better could be explored.

Fourth, this study advances the educational research about Somali parents' perceptions of the Canadian education system. Specifically, this study offers a direction for understanding the impact that the home environment has on children's learning. This study will add to educational research relating to parents and their viewpoints about student learning.

#### Delimitations of the Study

This study was limited to factors that impact positively or negatively the education of Somali students in Ottawa. Specifically, the study will look at the

perceptions of the parents of Somali high school students in public schools. Inferences from the results of the study may be used to conduct further research. However, no generalizations will be made from this study to the perceptions of all immigrant parents or to the rest of Canada outside the sampling area.

Nevertheless, information from this study may provide valuable insight into learning conditions in schools that help or hinder the academic success of immigrant and refugee students.

### Overview of the Study

Chapter one, then, is the introduction of the study. It discusses the research problem, the purpose of the study, its significance, and limitations. Chapter two presents the literature related to the historical development of the Somali education system, theories of learning, parent involvement in the education of their children, and home-school collaboration.

Chapter three explains the design of the study and procedures used to select the sample from Somali parents in Ottawa and the collection of data for each research question. Chapter four discusses the analysis of the data and presents the findings for each of the research questions. Chapter five summarizes the study. Implications drawn from the findings are stated and recommendations for further research are presented in this final chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review was to establish a conceptual and empirical base for the study. This base gave direction to the research process that was used to explore the Somali parents' perceptions of the factors affecting the learning of their high school children in Ottawa public schools. The literature review is presented in four parts.

First, the historical and cultural background of the Somali community and the crucial issues regarding their immigration to Canada are presented. Second, the historical development of the Somali educational system, which was a context for the schooling experiences of both the Somali parents and their children in Ottawa high schools, is discussed. Third, the literature on learning theories and the theoretical foundations for the impact of the home on student learning is examined. Fourth, the literature related to home-school collaboration in helping students learn better is reviewed.

#### Historical and Cultural Background of the Somalis

This part of the literature review presents the historical and cultural background of the Somali community and the crucial issues regarding their immigration to Canada. An overview of the historical and social setting of the Somalis, their immigration history and the unusual conditions under which they arrived in Canada are discussed. The forced and unfortunate refugee experience and the social context of their difficult

journey may have an impact on both the academic performance of Somali students and the expectations of their teachers and other school personnel.

### Historical and Social Setting

The Somali people and their land have a long history that has its beginnings in antiquity. As early as the fifteenth century B.C., the Egyptians traded with the Somalis to get Myrrh and frankincense for pharaonic temples. The area was known to them as the " Land of Punt". In the seventh century A.D, Islam reached Somalia through the trade between the Somalis and Arabs in the Red Sea coastal towns. The most famous coastal towns of that time were Mogadishu, Zeila, Merca, Bulahar, and Brava.

The Somali people are culturally, linguistically, and religiously one of the most homogenous populations in the African continent. Their traditional culture is characterized by democracy and egalitarianism (Lewis, 1961). The egalitarian aspect of the Somali culture attracted the interest of many European anthropologists such as I.M. Lewis (1961) who described it as " Pastoral Democracy". Other European writers (Laitin, 1977; Touval, 1963) have also addressed the egalitarian aspect of the Somali culture. In this culture, the clan chiefs are nominal. The community policies and decisions are debated in councils where every adult male has the right to speak at any time (Laitin, 1977). Richard Burton, who led a British expedition into northern Somalia in 1854, noted the culture of the Somalis and their pride.

While democracy, egalitarianism, nobility, pride, and love of freedom are drawn from their traditional culture, Somalis also display a strong attachment to Islam. Somalis are almost exclusively Sunni Muslims who adhere to Koranic laws. Religious



principles and traditional practices do sometimes conflict, and even though traditional practices may prevail, this does not diminish their strong attachment to Islam. In fact, history has shown that Islam strengthens and reinforces the Somali cultural heritage and nationalism (Andrzejewski, 1964; Lewis, 1961).

### Somali Immigration to Canada

Most of the Somalis in Canada came as refugees and not as immigrants. Their refugee experiences were different than the experiences of many traditional refugees and immigrants, in the sense that it was the first time in the history of the Somalis that such a significant number of the Somali population left their country seeking asylum (Ali, 1995). The civil war that put Somalia on the international map as the first failed state in modern history caused hundreds of thousands of Somali children, women, and elderly to seek a safe haven in Europe and North America.

Unlike other refugees from countries where there are governments, the departure of the Somalis was caused by crisis, lawlessness, and chaos. Parents and their children were separated during their escape, many were killed, others died on the way, and many family members ended up in different countries. Lack of a government to issue documents made their travel a nightmare. As a result, many of the refugees passed through four or five different countries before they reached Canada. Most of the Somali parents in Canada lost everything they had in Somalia. The lucky ones are those who arrived in Canada with their children.

A main characteristic of the Somali family pattern is an extended family system (Lewis, 1961). Lewis noted the central role the family plays in the social and cultural

environment. A survey done by Nuh (1995) found that the majority of the Somali households are single parents, whose spouses were killed, separated in transit, or trapped in Somalia without being able to escape. Since Somalis are a communal society, it is a new and difficult experience for single parents to raise children in a new country with different cultural values and without the social and emotional support of family or extended family members (Nuh,1995).

Sociologists have realized that the family is an important agent that provides the refugees with the psychological and emotional support they need to successfully settle, adopt, and integrate into the new society.

### The Somali Students in Ottawa

The student population in the Ontario school system have changed demographically over the last two decades (Ministry of Education Ontario, 1988). Immigrant and refugee students who are of diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds and who come to Canada from other parts of the world are both a great asset and a challenge for the education system and the society (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1988).

Such students bring with them an array of experiences and ideas that enrich the diverse and multicultural aspect of the Canadian education system. On the other hand, these students present a challenge for educators in the process of adjusting to a new culture, and a new system of education that may be very different from those they experienced.



Educators have to realize that the mission of education in the province of Ontario is to help all students in the system to develop and maintain the feelings of self worth in addition to acquiring the skills they need to become successful members of the Canadian society.

The number of Somali high school students in Ottawa who are considered to be at risk of dropping out of school has been increasing for the last several years(Levin, 1989). Unfortunately, many of the refugee students were forced to leave their home countries and most of them have experienced war trauma and pre-immigration problems that may have caused difficulties in their adjustment. The result of such previous experience is that high numbers of these children are growing up in adverse circumstances without supportive family members, and without community based education and culturally familiar learning environment (Boyer, 1991). They are in a situation where they lack the support of one or both of the home and the community, which are main learning environments that foster or hinder student learning.

### The Historical Development of Somali Education

Education is a foundation for the economic development and social advancement of every society. It is the way in which nations provide the necessary knowledge and skills that their children and youth need to acquire in order to become productive members of their society. In Africa, whether we call it informal, non-formal, or traditional education, the purpose of educating children was to prepare them for adulthood. Functionality was the main guiding principle in such an education (Fafunwa, 1982; Moumouni, 1968; Good, 1985).

An education system can best be understood through the environment within which it operates, since educational goals are generally shaped by social, economic, political, and cultural factors. Accordingly, the development of education in Somalia can be understood through five distinct historical stages (Good, 1985). The five stages are: Traditional Education, Islamic Education, Colonial Education, Education After Independence (1960-1969), and Education during the military era (1969-1990). Each stage had its own distinct educational goals and objectives. The following paragraphs briefly explain each of the five stages.

### Traditional Education

The Somali people have their own traditional education based on what was essential for children to learn in order to function effectively in the society as adults. The children are still educated in the family. Parents function as the first teachers for their children. As children grew up, the members of the immediate family, extended family, and the entire community all assume the responsibility of teaching children what the society expects them to learn. The children are physically and intellectually prepared not only to function well in the society as adults, but also to contribute to the economic development, social progress, and community leadership.

In order to meet its goals, traditional education is still linked to the sectors of the economy. In Somalia agriculture and livestock are the main economic sectors. Since rearing animals and farming are the main occupation and economic source of the majority of the Somali population, children in the nomadic areas still are provided with an education that prepares them for the challenges of nomadic life. At the age of seven

or eight, boys are sent out with their elder brothers, cousins, or with other relatives to look after camels or cows. They are trained to go without water, to take care of animals, to water and milk them, to identify the best grazing lands, and to take care of sick animals. In short, they are prepared to adapt to living in the nomadic environment.

In addition, they are taught different kinds of competitive games such as wrestling, high and long jump, and tactics of throwing spears. These competitive games help the physical and aptitude development of these young boys (Good, 1985; Lewis, 1961). The education of the boys is completed by inviting them to sit behind a circle of council of elders to listen and observe how community affairs are discussed and decisions are made. Children do not participate in the discussion but listen and observe. The objective is to prepare them for future leadership.

Historically, the expected occupational roles of women were different from those performed by men. Therefore, traditional education for girls was and is still different from the one boys were offered in the rural areas. Girls help their mothers fetch water and go with them to the market and observe how shopping is organized. The girls' education included baby sitting, cooking, techniques of preserving meat, weaving articles for the hut, making household utensils, and taking care of sheep and goats. Girls generally go with their mothers to women's meetings and learn how women make decisions concerning their roles in the community. Similar to the boys, they do not participate in the discussions but listen and observe how decisions are made.

At these community council meetings, children learn the decision making process within their community, the history of their community, the traditional laws known as "XEER", facilitation skills, and the management of community affairs.



In agricultural areas, all children are taught the skills of cultivation, harvesting, crop collection, soil analysis and knowledge of astrology to be able to predict and calculate weather.

### Islamic Education

Islam reached Somalia before it spread to most areas in the Arabian peninsula. After Somalis converted to Islam, they began establishing Koranic schools which were the first structured educational system in Somalia. In addition to the Koranic studies and Islamic values, Islamic education introduced reading and writing skills and arithmetic to the Somali children for the first time.

The introduction of reading and writing skills and arithmetic transformed the Koranic schools into a formal educational system that addresses literacy and numeracy in addition to its major goal of teaching children the Koran, the Hadith and other Islamic values. Islamic education remained to be the most expanding and the most accessible education system in Somalia. In 1982, there were seven times more Koranic schools than elementary schools in the country (U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID], 1984).

Koranic schools are community schools privately run by communities, and constitute a parallel system to the official formal education system. Parents make wooden boards, pens, and home-made ink for their children to use for writing the Koran. Children start Koranic school at age four or five, and study for two years before enrolling in elementary schools. After enrolling in elementary schools, children continue to attend afternoon Koranic schools.

The only structured education to which most of the children in the nomadic areas have access, are the Koranic schools. They are community schools in the sense that they are run by the community and supported by the community. In the nomadic and rural areas, there are mobile Koranic schools that follow the movements of the nomadic population. The Koranic schools continue to increase in number and appear to remain as the education the Somalis value most.

### Colonial Education: British Somaliland

The Koranic schools were well rooted in Somalia when the European colonialism began. Formal education systems brought by the colonial powers were alien to the realities of the needs of Somali children. The first European school was a French Roman Catholic mission which was opened in 1891. It was soon closed as a result of pressure from religious leaders who saw the school as an attempt to destroy the Islamic faith and undermine the Koranic schools. In 1905, the British colonial administration introduced an education system with limited objectives. The objectives of the colonial education were simply to prepare interpreters and clerical support staff for the colonial administration. As a result, three primary schools were opened despite the resistance of the religious leaders (Kaplan, et al., 1977; Lewis, 1980; Touval, 1963).

The expansion of education during the period between World War I and World War II was extremely limited. The British colonial administration decided to impose a tax on livestock in order to finance the services in the protectorate, including education. This met a fierce opposition from the Somalis, an opposition that expanded to schools

and to most of the towns in the protectorate. The British district commissioner in Burao was killed during these riots in 1922.

In 1935, the British colonial authorities introduced an education plan. Although establishing government run schools was the main purpose of this plan, supporting Koranic schools was also included. Due to opposition from the religious leaders, the plan was postponed until 1941, when the Italians were defeated by the British and both colonies came under the British military administration. In 1945, seven primary schools were opened in the north. In 1950, two intermediate schools were opened followed by the opening of the first school for girls in 1953 and the first secondary school (Lewis, 1980). In 1959, the year before independence, there were 3,713 students in government schools, and 3,500 in Koranic schools (Ministry of Education, Somalia, 1963).

#### Colonial Education: Italian Somalia

With the exception of the Koranic schools that existed before 1885, educational services were run by Roman catholic missions. The mission schools were viewed with suspicion by the Somalis, but there was less hostility towards western education than there was in the North (Lewis, 1980). The colonial administration subsidized one mission school in 1924 (Hess, 1966).

Enrollment in mission schools was limited since Somali parents preferred Koranic schools and because the mistrust of western education remained strong. In 1929, the Somali parents demanded that the government subsidize mosques and Koranic schools the same way they subsidized the mission schools and the churches (Kaplan, et al., 1977).



By 1935, there were ten primary schools for Somali students, but there were no intermediate schools. In 1941, when the British military administration took over the south, there were thirteen Italian mission schools. They increased that number to twenty nine and opened the first secondary school in 1950, the year the United Nations Trusteeship took over from Britain.

Under the United Nations Trusteeship, an education plan was introduced. Included in this general plan was the establish primary, secondary, and vocational schools. In 1953, a five year education plan was launched with the cooperation of United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to replace the mission schools with government run public schools. This plan increased the enrollment and established the education system inherited by the Somali government in 1960.

### Comparison of the Two Education Systems

It is a documented fact that education for the Somalis in both colonies was not a priority and was therefore neglected during the seventy years of colonial rule. The British colonial interest in the north was purely logistical and strategic. They needed Somalia for their garrison in Aden to supply with food. Compared to the Italian Somalia, there were three factors that contributed to the lack of educational initiatives in the British Somaliland.

First, since the Somaliland protectorate served only military strategic purposes, the British did not undertake any economic or social development initiatives (Touval, 1963). Second, the Somalis were also suspicious of any western education and feared

that western secular education would undermine their culture, values, and religion. They resisted western education and preferred to send their children to Koranic schools.

Third, there was no external pressure compared to the south where there was a set date for independence and a United Nations council was pressuring for rapid educational development.

The Italian colonial administration encouraged Italians to immigrate and establish their farms. The objectives of education in the south were similar to those in the north. In both colonies, education goals were limited to prepare clerical support staff for the colonial administration (Hess, 1966). Italian Somalia received the least education funds of the Italian colonies at the time.

A comparison of the two systems indicated that the Italian education reached more children in the primary level while there were more intermediate level students in the British system (Somali Ministry of Education, 1963). The ministry report had shown that the British system was highly selective and had better education in general. In the south, there was mass education which practiced unselective admission at the elementary level. As a result, the drop out rate in the Italian Somalia was 76% compared to 15% in the British Somaliland. The education in the south was free while students in the British system paid a school fee (Castagno, 1962; Laitin, 1977; Robinso, 1971).

### Education After Independence

The British Somaliland and the Italian Somalia achieved their independence in 1960 and immediately united to form the Somalia of today. The new Somali government inherited two formal education systems, a British system in the north and

an Italian system in the south. The two systems differed in structure, language of instruction and content. The British system consisted of two years of Koranic school as a pre-requisite for primary admission, three years of primary, four years of intermediate and four years of secondary school. Arabic was the medium of instruction in the primary school while English was introduced in the second year of the primary cycle. From grade four upwards English replaced Arabic as the medium of instruction (Ministry of Education, 1963).

In Italian Somalia, Koranic schooling was not a requirement for admission to primary school. The system consisted of five years of primary, three years of immediate, and four years of secondary level. Arabic was the medium of instruction for the first two years, and from the third grade Italian was the language of instruction (Ministry of Education, 1963; Robinson, 1971).

To unify the two systems, the government education plan required four years of primary, four years of intermediate, and four of years secondary education and prepared a common curriculum that made the education more relevant to the needs of the Somali students and the Somali society (Somali Republic, 1964). Arabic language was chosen to become the medium of instruction while English was introduced in grade two. From grade five English was used as the medium of instruction.

In 1967, integrated curricula for primary levels was completed. The main obstacle to smooth unification was the language of instruction. The issue of language of instruction remained unsolved until the military took over in 1969. After independence, there was a high demand for education and the elementary enrollments increased

tremendously. The lack of sufficient and trained teachers to meet the rising enrollments was another problem the newly born government met (Kaplan et al, 1977).

In addition to the lack of trained teachers, there were shortage of textbooks and other school materials. Lack of adequate financial resources, increased enrollments, lack of administrative efficiency and lack of trained staff were the factors that hindered any meaningful improvement of education in the first nine years of independence (Robinson, 1971; Somali ministry of education, 1967).

### Education After Military Revolution

The civilian governments who ruled Somalia from 1960 to 1969 made some attempts to improve education, but did not give education a high priority. The newly born government of the 1960s inherited two different systems of education, three foreign languages used as medium of instruction, and the challenge of adopting a script and writing the Somali language, a language that all Somalis speak. The educational policies of the civilian governments lacked direction. Somalia differed from other African nations who invested heavily in education as a means of social and economic development.

The military government of 1969 brought about several education reforms. The goals of education outlined by the military government were: Somalization of education, expansion of education, vocationalization of education, environmentalization of education, and socialization of education.

In 1972 the government adopted a Latin script for the Somali language. The writing of the Somali language was the beginning of the end of three foreign languages



previously used in education. The newly written national language enabled the educational expansion at the elementary level, and gave a direction and a national character to the education system. Private schools which accounted for 21% of the total enrollment were nationalized. The printing industry was also nationalized to meet the school demands for materials written in Somali language, and prepared literacy materials for a proposed national literacy campaign (Kaplan, et al, 1977).

During the period Between 1973 and 1975, massive nationwide literacy campaigns were launched throughout the country. Schools were closed for the 1974-75 academic year and over 25,000 students participated the literacy campaign. An estimated number of 1.2 million people participated in the literacy campaign as learners. As a result, Somalia was awarded the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization prize for outstanding achievement in literacy (UNESCO, 1984b).

In 1975, the government declared free and compulsory primary education for all Somali children, and Somali language became the medium of instruction for the first time in history. The enrollment rates rose from 78,153 in the 1973-74 academic year to 263,751 in the academic your of 1978-1979 (UNICEF, 1984b). Despite all the initiatives taken, the quality of education suffered for the emphasis on quantity. Among the factors that contributed to the decrease of educational quality were shortage of teachers, lack of enough textbooks and other instructional materials, unrealistic government education plans, and limited financial resources allocated for education.



## Learning Theories

This section discusses the meaning of human learning, conditions for effective learning, and the impact of the home on student learning.

### Human Learning

The meaning of human learning has long been debated among theorists and educators. Historically, most educators believed that some children were marginal because they lacked the innate capacity to learn what schools expect them to learn. These educators depended heavily on intelligence testing. In 1928, two educators found that the IQ of identical twins who were adopted and raised by two families of different educational and cultural backgrounds was significantly different (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987). Further studies have supported the idea that the difference was caused by the different learning environments provided by the two homes.

In the 1960s, educators realized that most students, if not all, have the ability to learn (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987). Some studies (Bloom, 1976) suggest that learning theories fail to acknowledge the importance of the history of the learner or the cognitive behavior and the affective characteristics of the learner. According to Bloom, cognitive behaviors are prerequisite knowledge and skills necessary for the next learning task, while affective characteristics are necessary for the motivation to learn new knowledge and skills. This research has important implications for both parents and teachers in their efforts to provide effective learning conditions for all children.

## Conditions for Effective Learning

"The problem for the family and the school is not to get children to learn but to stimulate and guide desirable learning" (Tyler, 1989).

Learning is central to human behavior and yet so difficult to understand. The centrality to human behavior and complexity of the learning process led many thinkers, psychologists and educators to investigate, research, and carefully study. These studies go as far back as Plato and Aristotle, whose views underpin most of the modern research on learning conducted by psychologists and educators. Learning has been defined in a variety of ways. Reform minded educators find that something takes place when people learn new things. They can do things that they have not done before (Tyler, 1986). Educators have identified through experience and experiments certain conditions that may help students to learn better what schools are expected to teach (Tyler, 1989, Sinclair, 1989). According to these educators, learning is the process by which humans develop new patterns of behaving: that is, new ways of thinking, feeling, or acting. Learning is active and requires putting into practice the behavior that is new to the learner. The challenge for educators is to motivate students so that their interest in desirable learning will increase.

Educators need to understand the simple fact that all children learn unless brain-damaged (Tyler, 1989). Learning can either be desirable or undesirable. Some of the conditions identified as promoting or supporting desirable learning are motivation, confidence, a clear idea of what is to be learned, sequential learning, appraisal and feedback, and transfer of knowledge (Tyler, 1989). Conditions for effective learning are created when parents and educators work together and home and school learning

experiences are connected. Home and school collaboration is essential for the creation of effective and meaningful learning conditions for all children.

### Impact of the Home on Student Learning

The family is the first educational environment children experience. It is an environment that is both conservative and generative. When considering the self-perception of children - their self-esteem and their confidence - it seems that what affects learners at one point of their learning has impact on their future learning. It is in the home educational environment that children develop language, attitudes, and other characteristics that are an essential basis for their future learning. This alone can justify the recognition of the family as an educational institution and of parents as the first teachers of the children in our schools.

### Home and School Collaboration

This section examines the theoretical foundations and perspectives regarding home and school collaboration.

### Theoretical Foundations and Perspectives

There are theories that serve as important tools in understanding both the mechanisms that produce effective school-home partnerships and the basic philosophical differences between the two institutions that may limit the effectiveness of their interactions (Epstein, 1987). Also, there is conception of the family as an important educational environment separate and distinct from the school environment.

This section of the literature review will develop a conceptual base from which to understand the perceptions of the Somali parents who participated in the study. First, some of the theories about institutional interactions are discussed. The literature emphasizes two fundamental theories, that of Symbolic Interactionism and that of Reference Group Theory (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1937; Merton, 1968; Stryker, 1992). The two theories help us to understand the mechanisms by which relationships are formed between institutions such as the family and school.

### Symbolic Interactionism

The Symbolic Interactionism theory suggests that our interaction with other people shape our beliefs, values, personality and even our self-concept. As a result, our behavior is influenced by our beliefs about how others perceive us (Blumer, 1937; Stryker, 1992). According to this theory, expectations play a central role in shaping our social behavior.

This theory explains the importance of understanding how interactions between schools and parents determine the role each institution assumes, the behaviors each manifests, the expectations they have for each other, and how they perceive each other's commitment to equal and quality education for all children. Further, it underlines the importance of interactions as a prerequisite to the establishment of more meaningful relations between schools and homes.



### Reference Group Theory

The second theory that explains the mechanisms that create relationships is Reference Group Theory (Merton, 1968). This theory suggests that there are important connections between students' self esteem and the kind of interaction they have with their teachers. This explains the degree to which individuals take others into account when making decisions. For example, school teachers and administrators who include parents and other school community members in the process of educational decision making are recognizing the parents and the community as an important reference group.

In education, one way helping students learn better, is school personnel and parents to recognize each other as an important reference group.

### Perspectives on Relationships

The literature on the relationships of schools and homes reveals that theoretical perspectives that guide vary in emphasis and complexity. These perspectives continue to influence philosophies and approaches taken by teachers and parents in their efforts to establish home and school partnerships. The theoretical perspectives on home and school relationships can be categorized into four groups based on the direction of emphasis. The four theoretical perspectives share many ideas but vary in terms of the emphasis each places on a specific direction.

According to Epstein (1990) these perspectives are categorized in terms of their major emphasis. Emphasis on separateness of schools and families, emphasis on critical stages and sequencing, emphasis on ecology and embeddedness, and finally emphasis on overlapping spheres of influence. The differences between these perspectives depend

on the assumption each makes about the roles and responsibilities of homes and schools in educating children, and the nature of their interactions. It is important to assess the degree to which each of the perspectives serves to explain the issue of home and school partnerships.

The perspective that puts emphasis on the separateness of schools and families goes back to the sociology of education in the 1930s. One of the advocates of this perspective was W. Waller (1932) who argued that for the healthy development of the child, the separation of the school and the home are necessary. Other researchers (Parson, 1959; Weber, 1947) supported Waller's argument.

### Philosophies of Parent Involvement

The difference between the models of parent involvement is the difference of the philosophies they are based on. The importance for educators to understand the underlying philosophies for parent involvement programs has been addressed by Swap (1990). Swap, who addresses the philosophies of parent involvement programs, particularly in urban settings, has identified three different philosophies that greatly influence the ways in which parent involvement is implemented by different institutions.

The three identified philosophies are: School to Home Transmission, Interactive Learning, and Partnership for School Success.

## Barriers to Parent Involvement in School

The idea of parents and teachers, homes and schools working together to improve the educational opportunities for all children is a popular concept in the literature of school reform. Even though parents and teachers recognize the value of parent participation, there remain serious barriers to the implementation of designed programs to increase parent participation.

Research studies have shown that teachers believe that parental involvement can have beneficial effects (Moles, 1982). Also it has been found that parents want to be involved in school and kept informed (Harris, 1987). In fact, parents and teachers share the view that it is important for parents and teachers to be involved at home and at the school (Harris, 1987). Yet, many studies have shown that teachers and parents do not collaborate in addressing the crucial issues related to student learning (Comer, 1980; Swap, 1987; Dauber & Epstein, 1991).

This evidence led a number of researchers to examine the conditions that hinder parent participation in school activities. Lightfoot (1987) stated that the problem arises from the particularistic views of parents and the universalistic concerns of schools, a thought that goes back to Waller's (1934) exclusiveness characterization of the relationships between families and schools. Other studies (Lareau, 1989; Sasser, 1991; Swap, 1990) indicate that tensions between teachers and parents are caused by their perceptions of each other, and unrealistic expectations for each other.

Realizing the importance of homes and schools working together to improve the educational opportunities for all children led many reform educators to examine carefully the tensions that hinder such collaboration (Tyler, 1989; Sinclair & Ghory,



1981). Their studies have shown assumptions present in school personnel that have profound effects on parent teacher relationships in particular and homes and school relations in general. They argue that it is not only important, but necessary to explore the underlying assumptions of the current school and home relationships and propose alternatives in order to establish healthy and constructive relationships.

### Parent Involvement in Schools

Research studies on parent involvement (Wolfendale, 1992; Johnston, 1990; Catterott, 1994) indicate that parental involvement in the education of children increased significantly in the 1970s. The introduction of the Head Start Program in the early 1970s by most of the school systems in the United States marks the beginning of looking seriously at the role of parents in the education of their children.

These studies have shown that the chances of success increase when parents and teachers establish constructive relationships (Comer, 1993). Recent reform studies (Tyler, 1989 ; Sinclair, 1987; Johnston, 1990) found the importance and value of parental involvement in the schooling process. Involving all parents in the education of their children is no easy task and in light of cultural and linguistic differences, immigrant and refugee parents present a special challenge.

The practices and procedures that are appropriate and feasible for the majority of Canadian born parents often fall short of their intended purposes with the immigrant and refugee parents (Torres-Gusman, 1991). One main factor that deserves consideration is the way different ethno-cultural groups view the role and responsibility of the schools in the education of students. Since the diversity of the student population in our schools is



constantly increasing, parent involvement is not an option but the only way in which educators can provide equal and quality education to all children.

### Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the historical and cultural background of the Somali community, and the crucial issues regarding their immigration to Canada. Also, the literature on historical development of Somali education system, learning theories, parent involvement in the education of their children, theoretical foundations for the impact of the home on student learning, and the home and school collaboration in helping students learn better is reviewed. This review of literature leads to an understanding of the import of this research and ensures that the investigation of parent perceptions is on solid ground. The research design and specific procedures for collecting and treating the resulting data are described in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the specific procedures and methodologies utilized in this study. It details the description of the population, the processes involved in the sample selection from the population of Somali high school parents, and the background and development of the research instrument. Finally, The distribution of the survey, methods of data collection, and the procedures used to organize, analyze, and report the data are explained.

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. A descriptive research effort involves collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study or to test a hypothesis. Since this study seeks to answer questions concerning the current status of the perceptions of the Somali parents whose children are attending Ottawa high schools, which is a particular population, it is consistent with Gay's(1976) definition of descriptive research.

Again, the major purpose of this study is to collect data about the Somali parents' perceptions of the factors affecting the learning of their children in Ottawa high schools. Specifically, the study was guided by the following four research questions

1. What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school conditions that help the Somali high school students who are succeeding in their learning?

2. What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school conditions that hinder the learning of the Somali high school students who are at risk of failure in their learning?
3. How important do the parents of Somali high school students see the home-school collaboration in helping their children succeed in their learning?
4. What recommendations do Somali parents suggest to improve school learning conditions for their children in Ottawa high schools?

The four research questions served as the basis for the construction of the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews. Every item of the questionnaire is related to one of the four research questions. The questionnaire and follow-up interviews are the instrumentation utilized for data collection in this study.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to investigate the Somali parents' perceptions of the factors impacting the learning of their children attending Ottawa public schools. By definition, validity is the degree to which a survey measures what it is intended to measure. Both content and translation validities were important in this investigation since the questionnaire was written in both English and Somali languages. The validity of the questionnaire was determined by a panel of Somali educators in Ottawa.

#### Selection of Population

The major population of this exploratory study is the parents of the Somali high school students in Ottawa public schools. There are an estimated 300 Somali parents

whose children are attending Ottawa high schools. The Somali parents have common characteristics such as: language spoken, cultural values, religion, and ethnicity.

However, their diversity in terms of their level of education, socio-economic status, gender, number of years in Canada, marital status, and immigration status, may impact their responses. Therefore, a representative random sample was selected to participate in this study and to produce the data about the parents' perceptions of factors impacting the learning of their children. This way, the results of the study could be generalized to the population of the study. Any differences in responses are examined on the basis of the above mentioned aspects of diversity.

#### Selection of Participants

The sample was selected from the parents of the Somali high school students in Ottawa public schools. This is a homogeneous population in terms of language, religion, cultural values and ethnicity. A representative sample of 90 parents (30%) of the total population of 300 parents was selected for this study so that the results could be generalizable to the larger population of parents of the Somali high school students in Ottawa public schools.

The researcher prepared a letter (see Appendix B) which was sent to each participant chosen for the study. The letter explained the study, its purpose and significance, and asked each participant if he/she was willing to participate. In addition, the letter explained that it is voluntary to participate, and discussed clearly the confidentiality issues.



### Development of Research Instruments

The type of educational research used for this study was descriptive in nature, with an emphasis on survey research. Both questionnaires and follow up interviews were conducted to determine the Somali parents perceptions of the factors affecting the education of their children in Ottawa high schools. The questionnaire was employed to collect descriptive information from a specific sample of Somali parents and a telephone interview was used to follow up the survey respondents and non-respondents.

For the design of this study, the survey instruments used to collect data are questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The use of questionnaires has some definite advantages over other methods of collecting data. For example, a questionnaire is much more efficient in that it requires less time, is less expensive, and permits the collection of data from a larger sample of a population. The four research questions that guide the study were the basis for the development of the research instruments used to obtain the data.

A focus group of five high school teachers and 10 Somali high school students in Ottawa public schools were selected and given the research questions. Each of the two focus groups was asked to list the school and non-school factors that affect negatively the education of Somali high school students who are not succeeding in learning. The factors listed by the two focus groups were consistent with the findings of previous studies (Abel, 1993; Ali, 1994). These factors and literature review related to student learning were used as the basis for the construction of questions 1 and 2 of the survey. Question 3 is based on the literature review on home-school collaboration in improving learning conditions for all children, while the purpose of question 4, which is

open-ended, is to find out what Somali parents recommend to be done so that public schools could serve all children on equal terms.

Most questionnaires are either descriptive or predictive (Labaw, 1980).

Descriptive questionnaires are concerned with fact finding, while on the other hand, predictive questionnaires predict behavior and establish hypothesis about future events and ask participants to respond to invented scenarios. This descriptive study relies on the use of a questionnaire to collect parent perceptions.

A focus group of Somali parents whose children were attending the Ottawa high schools were selected and given the four research questions. The focus group was similar to the sample of the study, but was not part of the sample. The group listed the factors that they perceive to impact the learning of their children. The findings of the literature review and the responses of the focus group served as the basis for the development of the survey questionnaire.

The complete questionnaire, a consent form, and a cover letter were written in English and Somali. The English version of the questionnaire, the consent form, and the cover letter were given to two Somali educators to translate into Somali. Likewise, the Somali version of the materials were given to two other Somali educators to translate into English. The new English and Somali versions of the materials were reviewed by the four Somali educators and the researcher to determine accuracy. They were then compared to the original versions to find out if there were differences that may have been caused by the translation and may impact the responses of the participants.

Any resulting differences were then corrected and final forms of the questionnaire and other materials were pretested with a small sample of the population

of this study. This small sample was not included in the sample selected for this study. An evaluation was made from the results of the pre-test and revisions were considered for the final forms of the questionnaires, the consent form, and cover letter written in both English and Somali. The revised and finalized materials were prepared for distribution so that data collection could be utilized.

### Distribution of the Survey and Collection of Data

This study used a mail survey questionnaire (Appendix D) as the method of data collection to answer the research questions. Some of the benefits of this method as related to this specific study over other methods are that it takes less time, it can be done at one's own convenience, and it can enable the researcher to collect data from a large sample in less time than an interview.

Mailed survey questionnaires, however, have some limitations. Among these limitations are obtaining responses from a representative sample that could be generalizable to the population of the study and low response rates. These factors were taken into consideration in developing the research instruments and choosing the method of its distribution, as well as procedures for collecting data, organizing, and analyzing the results.

The methodology is presented according to the four research questions that guided the study. The process lists of parents of Somali high school students in Ottawa public schools. The purpose of the phone calls was to introduce the study to them, to

determine their willingness to participate in the study, and to confirm their current mailing addresses.

Using their current mailing addresses, a copy of the questionnaire, a consent form, and a cover letter introducing the study, its significance, and the importance of parents participation and cooperation were mailed to each willing participant. A stamped addressed return envelope was provided to participants in order to facilitate the return of the questionnaire and consent form within a reasonable period of time. A three week period was suggested.

### Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected from the parent responses to each Item of each of questions 1, 2, and 3 were first recorded in a computer using Microsoft Excel. The data was then transferred to a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to be analyzed. The results of the analysis are presented in tabular form. The collected parent responses to question four were 255 in number and were grouped into main categories for analysis. The results of these analysis are reported in chapter four.

### Summary

This chapter explained the major components of the design. A description of the population of the study was presented along with the description of the selection process used to determine the sample of parent research participants. Details of the research methods that were used to answer the four research questions which guided this study were explained. In addition, the development of the research instruments and procedures



for collecting, organizing, and analyzing survey and descriptive data were elaborated. The collected data was transferred to Microsoft Excel, and the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used for the data analysis. The results of the study are reported in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present, analyze and interpret the data obtained from the survey responses of 85 Somali parents whose children attend Ottawa high schools. The data were collected from December of 1996 to March of 1997. This study describes the Somali parents' perceptions of the school and non-school learning conditions that positively or negatively impact the education of their children in Ottawa high schools.

The data analysis in this chapter is presented in four sections based on the four research questions that guided this study. The first section answers the question: What school and non-school learning conditions do Somali parents consider helpful to their children in Ottawa high schools who are succeeding in their learning? The second section answers the question: What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school learning conditions that hinder the learning of Somali high school students in Ottawa who are at risk of failure in their learning? The third section answers the question: How important do Somali parents consider home-school collaboration to be in helping students succeed in their learning? Finally, section four answers the question: What do Somali parents recommend to improve school and non-school learning conditions for all children?

The data collected from the survey was coded and transferred to Microsoft Excel. The data was analyzed with SPSS statistics package and displayed in tabular and graphic forms. The data from responses to question 4, regarding recommendations, were

analyzed for themes and organized by categories such as student needs, parent involvement, staff development, curriculum reform and safe environment. The descriptive results of the data were analyzed using percentages. In presenting the results of the questionnaire, the data gathered were analyzed using percentages.

### Research Question 1

What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school conditions that help the Somali high school students to succeed in their learning? This section analyzes and presents findings related to research question 1 by looking survey results. It consists of three parts. First, the survey statements related to school learning conditions that hinder the academic success of the Somali high school students are presented. The survey statements are based on the factors identified by the two focus groups of Ottawa high school teachers and Somali high school students attending Ottawa public schools.

Second, the analysis of survey responses of 85 Somali parents pertaining to the school and non-school learning conditions that hinder the academic success of Somali high school students in Ottawa are discussed. Third, the findings gleaned from the parents' responses to each of the statements related to question 1 of the survey are presented.

### Survey Results Relating To Question 1

The survey contained 15 statements which could give possible answers to question 1. These survey statements are based on factors identified by a focus groups of

Ottawa high school teachers and Somali high school students in Ottawa. These survey statements are:

1. My child is motivated by school teachers
2. My child is treated like any other child
3. My child is provided with a safe environment in school
4. My child is provided with equal access to learning opportunities
5. My child is supported with his/her homework
6. My child has clear future goals
7. My child has a good school attendance record
8. My child receives appraisal and feedback from teachers
9. My child is given a clear idea of what is to be learned
10. School guidance counselors are sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences of students
11. School books reflect the cultural diversity of the student population
12. My child has a realistic view of his/her ability
13. My child realizes the importance of reading and writing
14. My child believes that he/she could handle regular programs without ESL
15. The ESL program was not effective for my child.

The parents were asked to read these statements and indicate if they strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the statements by circling 1,2,3,4,5 depending on the one that corresponds with their position. The



responses of the 85 parent participants in the survey to each of the above 15 statements under question 1 of the study is shown in tabular form.

In the discussion of the data from each item under question 1 of the survey, strongly agree and agree are viewed as positive responses and are combined to give a total positive response. Likewise, strongly disagree and disagree are combined to give total negative response.

Table 1 shows that 40% of the parents agree that teachers encourage their children. 29.4% are undecided while 30.6% disagree. It seems that parent responses to item 1.1 vary widely. Table 2 indicates that the majority (40%) of parents were undecided whether their children are equally treated in the schools.

Table 1  
Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.1

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree that their children are motivated by school teachers.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
Agree	32	37.6	37.6	40.0
Undecided	25	29.4	29.4	69.4
Disagree	23	27.1	27.1	96.5
Strongly disagree	3	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.2

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children are equally treated in schools.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	3	3.5	3.5	3.5
Agree	20	23.5	23.5	27.1
Undecided	34	40.0	40.0	67.1
Disagree	24	28.2	28.2	95.3
Strongly disagree	4	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 indicates that 14 parents (16.5%) of the respondents agree with the statement that their children are provided safe school environment, while 33 parents (38.8%) are not sure and neither agree nor disagree. The remaining 38 parents (44.7%) disagree. The analysis of the responses show that there is a general feeling among parents that Somali high students experience a hostile school environments.

Table 4 indicates that only 8 parents (9.5%) of the total 85 parent respondents agree with the statement that their children are provided equal access to learning opportunities. The majority of 45 parents (52.9%) neither agree nor disagree, while the remaining 32 parents (37.7%) stated that their children are not provided equal access to learning opportunities. This indicates that there is limited communication between parents and the teachers of their children.

Table 3

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.3

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree that their children are provided safe environment in schools.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
Agree	12	14.1	14.1	16.5
Undecided	33	38.8	38.8	55.3
Disagree	35	41.2	41.2	96.5
Strongly disagree	3	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.4

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children are provided equal access to learning opportunities.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
Agree	6	7.1	7.1	9.4
Undecided	45	52.9	52.9	62.4
Disagree	26	30.6	30.6	92.9
Strongly disagree	6	7.1	7.1	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that 75 parents (88.3%) of the total respondents stated that their children receive support with their homework at home. Eight parents(9.5%) of the parent respondents acknowledged that their children have no assistance with homework at home, and two parent respondents(2.4%) of the total respondents were unable to decide whether the support with homework that their children receive is enough or not. Again, the results show that differences exist between parents' and teachers' expectations and understandings of what constitutes appropriate homework support. This difference may be an outcome of lack of effective communication between Somali parents and the teachers of their children.

Table 5

Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.5

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children are supported with homework at home.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	10	11.8	11.8	11.8
Agree	65	76.5	76.5	88.2
Undecided	2	2.4	2.4	90.6
Disagree	6	7.1	7.1	97.6
Strongly disagree	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	



Table 6 shows that 68 parents (80%) of the total respondents stated that their children have clear future goals. Only 10 parents (11.7%) of the total parent participants in the study stated that their children have no clear future goals. The remaining seven parents (8.2%) of the respondents are not sure and therefore, stated their position as undecided.

Table 6

Parent Responses to Statement 1.6

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children have clear future goals.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	8	9.4	9.4	9.4
Agree	60	70.6	70.6	80.0
Undecided	7	8.2	8.2	88.2
Disagree	3	3.5	3.5	91.8
Strongly disagree	7	8.2	8.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows that 83 parents (97.6%) of the 85 respondents stated that their children have good school attendance record. Only 2 parents (2.4%) stated that they are not sure how good or poor is the school attendance of their children. School attendance was one of the factors identified by the focus group of high school teachers that hinder the academic success of the Somali high school students. Surprisingly, parents have a

Table 7

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.7

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children have good attendance record.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	30	35.3	35.3	35.3
Agree	53	62.4	62.4	97.6
Undecided	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

completely different perception. The only explanation can be the lack of communication, cooperation.

Table 8 indicates that the majority of respondents (38.8%) were undecided while 37.7% agreed that their children receive no appraisal and feedback from teachers; 23.5% disagreed. Table 9 indicated that 50.6% of respondents were undecided, while 32.7% disagreed that their children were given a clear idea of what is to be learned. Only 17.5% agreed that children were told what was to be learned.

Table 10 indicates that 40% of respondents were undecided; a majority of 54.2% disagreed; and only 5.9% agreed that guidance counselors are sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences among students. Table 11 indicates that 77.2% of respondents agree that schoolbooks do not reflect the cultural diversity of the student population.

Table 8

## Parent Responses to Statement 1.8

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children receive appraisal and feedback from teachers.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
Agree	30	35.3	35.3	37.6
Undecided	33	38.8	38.8	76.5
Disagree	17	20.0	20.0	96.5
Strongly disagree	3	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 9

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.9

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children are given a clear idea of what is to be learned.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	4	4.7	4.7	4.7
Agree	11	12.9	12.9	17.6
Undecided	43	50.6	50.6	68.2
Disagree	24	28.2	28.2	96.5
Strongly disagree	3	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 10

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.10

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that school guidance counselors are sensitive to the cultural and ethnic differences of students.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
Agree	4	4.7	4.7	5.9
Undecided	34	40.0	40.0	45.9
Disagree	27	31.8	31.8	77.6
Strongly disagree	19	22.4	22.4	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 11

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.11

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that school books reflect the cultural diversity of the student population.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
Agree	2	2.4	2.4	3.5
Undecided	7	8.2	8.2	11.8
Disagree	47	55.3	55.3	67.1
Strongly disagree	28	32.9	32.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	



Table 12 indicates that 84.7% of respondents agreed that prior education experiences negatively affect the performance of their children. Table 13 indicates 78 of the 85 responding parents agreed that their children realize the importance of reading and writing. Table 14 indicates that 51 of the 85 respondents agreed that their children can handle regular programs without ESL support. Table 15 indicates that 46 of the 85 respondents disagree that the ESL program provided to their children is effective. Thirty-five parents believe it is effective, while four respondents remained undecided.

Table 12

Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.12

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that prior educational experiences affect negatively the performance of their children.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	7	8.2	8.2	8.2
Agree	65	76.5	76.5	84.7
Undecided	7	8.2	8.2	92.9
Disagree	6	7.1	7.1	100.0
Strongly disagree	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 13

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.13

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children realize the importance of reading and writing.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	25	29.4	29.4	29.4
Agree	53	62.4	62.4	91.8
Undecided	6	7.1	7.1	98.8
Disagree	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 14

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.14

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that they their children can handle regular programs without ESL support.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	16	18.8	18.8	18.8
Agree	35	41.2	41.2	60.0
Undecided	29	34.1	34.1	94.1
Disagree	4	4.7	4.7	98.8
Strongly Disagree	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 15

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 1.15

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree the effectiveness of the ESL program their children are provided.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
Agree	33	38.8	38.8	41.2
Undecided	4	4.7	4.7	45.9
Disagree	38	44.7	44.7	90.6
Strongly disagree	8	9.4	9.4	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

### Findings for Research Question #1

What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school learning conditions that help the Somali high school students in Ottawa that are succeeding in their learning? The results of the data analysis show that differences do exist between parents' and teachers' expectations and understandings of what constitutes appropriate homework support. These differences may indicate lack of effective communication and collaboration between Somali parents and the teachers of their children. However, the majority of the parents reported that home and school cooperation, open communication between parents and school personnel, are crucial for creating meaningful learning environments for all students.

## Research Question 2

What are the school and non-school learning conditions that hinder student learning as perceived by Somali parents? This section analyzes and presents the findings related to research question 2 by looking at the survey results. The section consists of three parts. First, the survey statements related to school and non-school conditions that hinder immigrant students' learning as perceived by the teachers focus group and the Somali high school students' focus group are presented. Second, the data from the responses of the Somali parents to each of the survey statements under question 2 are analyzed. Third, findings from parent responses to the statements are presented.

### Survey Statements Relating To Question 2

The survey contained 14 statements which could give answers to research question 2. These statements are based on factors identified by two focus groups: a focus group of Ottawa high school teachers and a focus group of Somali high school students in Ottawa. The statements are:

1. My child is discouraged by teachers' attitudes to his/her abilities
2. My child is treated differently by teachers
3. My child is subjected to direct and indirect harassment in school
4. My child is denied equal access to learning opportunities
5. My child has no support with homework
6. My child has no clear future goals
7. My child has a poor school attendance record



8. My child receives no appraisal and feedback from teachers
9. School books do not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of student population
10. Guidance counselors are not sensitive to the individual needs of immigrant students
11. My child has no realistic view of his/her ability
12. The performance of my child is negatively affected by prior educational experiences
13. Extra home responsibility prevents my child from concentrating on his/her school work
14. My child believes that he/she could not handle regular programs without ESL

The data analysis of the parent responses to the survey statements of question 1 are explained in tabular form. The percentage of respondents who strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree or undecided to each item of the survey is explained and shown in the following tables. Strongly agree and agree responses are combined.

Likewise, strongly disagree and disagree responses are also combined.

Table 16 shows that 26 (31.8%) of the responding parents stated their agreement with the statement that their children are discouraged by teachers' negative attitudes towards their abilities. Twenty-five (29.4%) of the respondents stated that they do not have enough information to make a decision. The remaining 32 (38.8%) of the participant respondents disagreed.

Table 16

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.1

Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree that their children are discouraged by teachers attitudes towards their abilities.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	6	7.1	7.1	7.1
Agree	21	24.7	24.7	31.8
Undecided	25	29.4	29.4	61.2
Disagree	32	37.6	37.6	98.8
Strongly disagree	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 17 shows that 24 (28.2%) of the respondents agree with the statement that their children are treated differently. Thirty-nine (45.9%) of the total respondents are undecided, and the remaining 22 (25.9%) of the respondents stated their disagreement with the above statement.

Table 18 shows that 45 (52.9%) of the total respondents believe that their children are subjected to direct and indirect racial harassment in the schools they attend. Twenty-eight (32.9%) of the responding parents indicated that they did not have enough information that either supports the above statement or opposes and therefore, remained undecided. The remaining 12 (14.2%) of the survey participants stated that they disagree with the statement that their children are subjected to direct and indirect racial harassment in schools.

Table 17

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.2

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children are treated differently by teachers.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	5	5.9	5.9	5.9
Agree	19	22.4	22.4	28.2
Undecided	39	45.9	45.9	74.1
Disagree	18	21.2	21.2	95.3
Strongly disagree	4	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 18

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.3

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children are subjected to direct and indirect harassment in school.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	4	4.7	4.7	4.7
Agree	41	48.2	48.2	52.9
Undecided	28	32.9	32.9	85.9
Disagree	7	8.2	8.2	94.1
Strongly disagree	5	5.9	5.9	100.0
Total	85	100.00	100.0	

Table 19 shows that 24 (28.2%) of the parent respondents believe that their children are denied equal access to quality learning opportunities. The majority of respondents 49 (57.6%) of the total survey participants remained undecided. The remaining 12 (14.1%) disagreed with the statement that their children are denied equal access to learning opportunities.

Table 19

Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.4

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children are denied equal access to learning opportunities.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	5	5.9	5.9	5.9
Agree	19	22.4	22.4	28.2
Undecided	49	57.6	57.6	85.9
Disagree	8	9.4	9.4	95.3
Strongly disagree	4	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 20 shows the responses of the survey participants to item 5 of survey statements of question 2. The results of the data analysis show that 11 (12.9%) of the parents believe that their children have no support with their homework. Only one parent remained undecided. The rest of the responding parents, 73 (85.8%) of the total survey participants indicated that their children receive some support with their



Table 20

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.5

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children have no support with homework.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	3	3.5	3.5	3.5
Agree	8	9.4	9.4	12.9
Undecided	1	1.2	1.2	14.1
Disagree	62	72.9	72.9	87.1
Strongly disagree	11	12.9	12.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

homework. It is not clear whether parents and teachers have the same understanding of what they consider support with homework should be.

Table 21 shows the responses of parents to item 6 of the survey statements. The results indicate that the majority of the responding parents disagree with the statement that their children have no support with home work. Only 11 parents (12.9%) stated that their children have no support with homework. One parent out of the responding 85 was in the undecided category. Seventy-three parents (85.8%) believe that their children are supported with their homework.

Table 22 shows that most parents disagree with the statement that the school attendance of their children is poor. Only 2 parents agree with the statement. Only one parent was undecided. The remaining 49 parents (57.6%) of the 85 responding parents disagree with statement.

Table 21

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.6

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children have no clear goals.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	5	5.9	5.9	5.9
Agree	3	3.5	3.5	9.4
Undecided	8	9.4	9.4	18.8
Disagree	58	68.2	68.2	87.1
Strongly disagree	11	12.9	12.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 22

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.7

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that the school attendance of their children are poor.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
Agree	1	1.2	1.2	2.4
Undecided	1	1.2	1.2	3.6
Disagree	49	57.6	57.6	61.2
Strongly disagree	33	38.8	38.8	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 23 shows that parents are divided in responding to the statement that their children receive no appraisal and feedback from teachers. Twenty-three parents (27.1%) agreed with the statement that their children receive no appraisal and feedback from their teachers. Thirty-four respondents (40%) were undecided, and the remaining 28 (32.9%) of the responding parents disagree with the statement and believe that their children receive appraisal and feedback from their teachers.

Table 23

Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.8

Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children receive no appraisal and feedback from teachers.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	4	4.7	4.7	4.7
Agree	19	22.4	22.4	27.1
Undecided	34	40.0	40.0	67.1
Disagree	28	32.9	32.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 24 shows that a majority of 75 (88.2%) of the 85 responding parents agree that school books and other instructional materials do not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student population in Ottawa public schools. The remaining 10 parents (11.8%) of the total were undecided.

Table 24

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.9

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that school books and other instructional materials do not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student population.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	23	27.1	27.1	27.1
Agree	52	61.2	61.2	88.2
Undecided	10	11.8	11.8	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 25 shows that more than half of the respondents believe that school guidance counselors are not sensitive to the individual needs of immigrant students. Table 2.10 shows that 48 parents (56.5%) agreed with the statement that guidance counselors are not sensitive to the individual needs of immigrant students. Another 33 respondents (38.8%) of the total were undecided. Only 4 respondents (4.7%) disagreed with the survey statement.

Table 26 shows that a small number of 6 parents (7.1) of the total parent respondents agree with the statement that their children have no realistic goals. Eight parents were undecided. The remaining 71 respondents (83.5%) of the total disagreed with the survey statement as shown in Table 26.



Table 25

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.10

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that school guidance counselors are not sensitive to the individual needs of immigrant students.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	17	20.0	20.0	20.0
Agree	31	36.5	36.5	56.5
Undecided	33	38.8	38.8	95.3
Disagree	4	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 26

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.11

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children have no realistic goals.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Agree	6	7.1	7.1	7.1
Undecided	8	9.4	9.4	16.5
Disagree	66	77.6	77.6	94.1
Strongly disagree	5	5.9	5.9	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 27 shows that only 6 respondents (7.1) agree with the statement that prior educational background affects negatively the academic performances of their children in Ottawa high schools. Another 33 (38.8%) were undecided. The remaining 46 (54.1%) of the respondents disagreed.

Table 27

Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.12

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that prior educational background affects negatively the academic performance of their children in Ottawa high schools.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
Agree	4	4.7	4.7	7.1
Undecided	33	38.8	38.8	45.9
Disagree	37	43.5	43.5	89.4
Strongly disagree	9	10.6	10.6	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 28 shows that 13 (15.3%) of the parents who participated in the survey agree with the statement that extra responsibilities at home prevent their children from concentrating on their homework. Only 6 (7.1%) remained undecided. A majority of 66 (77.7%) of the total respondents disagreed with the above statement.

Table 28

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.13

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that extra responsibility at home prevents their children from concentrating on their school work.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
Agree	11	12.9	12.9	15.3
Undecided	6	7.1	7.1	22.4
Disagree	60	70.6	70.6	92.9
Strongly disagree	6	7.1	7.1	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 29 shows that 35 (41.2%) of the parent respondents agree with the statement that their children believe that they can not handle regular programs without ESL. Only 2 parents were undecided. The remaining 48 (56.5%) disagreed.

### Findings of Research Question # 2

The findings for research question 2 are gleaned from the data analysis of 14 survey statements. The Parent respondents were given the survey statements and asked to indicate whether they agree, disagree, or are undecided with each of the statements. After the data analysis, the survey items in which more than 50% of the respondents either agreed or disagreed are selected for the discussion of the findings of question two. These items are: (1) Lack of homework support; (2) Poor school attendance; (3) Lack of

Table 29

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 2.14

(Parents stated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that their children believe that they can not handle regular programs without ESL.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly Agree	3	3.5	3.5	3.5
Agree	32	37.6	37.6	41.2
Undecided	2	2.4	2.4	43.5
Disagree	38	44.7	44.7	88.2
Strongly disagree	10	11.8	11.8	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

students' realistic goals; (4) Prior educational experiences; (5) Students' higher expectations of their abilities; (6) School books and instructional materials; and (7) Counselors' low expectations for immigrant students (8) Direct and indirect harassment in schools (9) Ineffective ESL programs.

The first five items are based on the factors identified by the focus group of Ottawa high school teachers, While the last four are based on the factors identified by the focus group of Somali high school students. The results of the data analysis show that parents disagree with what the teachers consider to be the major factors that hinder the academic success of Somali high school students. On the other hand, parents either agree with or do not have enough information to make a decision about the factors identified by their children. Parent responses regarding what they consider to be the factors that hinder the performance of their children are generally the same in most



cases. However, their opinions split when it comes to teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students, different treatment of immigrant students, and lack of teachers' appraisal and feedback. The factors that more than fifty percent (50%) of the responding parents consider to be the hindrance to the learning of their children are: direct and indirect harassment in schools; inappropriate school books and other instructional materials; school guidance counselors' lack of sensitivity to the individual needs of refugee and immigrant students; and ineffective ESL programs.

The parent responses regarding these factors are as follows:

1. Direct and indirect harassment in schools. As shown in Table 2.3, 45 parents which is 52.9% of the total survey parents of 85 parents stated that their children experience direct and indirect harassment in the schools they attend.

2. School books and other instructional materials. Table 2.9 shows that 75 parents, a majority of (88.2%) of the total responding parents stated that school books and other instructional materials do not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student population of Ottawa public schools.

3. The lack of sensitivity on the part of school guidance counselors to the individual needs of immigrant students. As illustrated in Table 2.10, 48 parent respondents, which is (56.5%) of the 85 survey participants, agreed to the statement that school guidance counselors are not sensitive to the individual needs of immigrant students.

### Research Question 3

How important do Somali parents consider the home-school collaboration in helping students succeed in their learning? This section analyzes and presents the findings related to question 3 by looking survey results. It is divided into two parts. First, the data from the responses of Somali parents to five statements that are related to the impact of home-school collaboration on students success in their learning is analyzed. Second, Findings from parent responses to the five statements are presented.

#### Survey Results Relating to Question 3 of the Survey

1. Home-school collaboration builds children's confidence
2. Home school collaboration encourages parent teacher communication
3. Home-school collaboration creates trust between parents and teachers
4. Home-school collaboration encourages parent involvement in school
5. Home-school collaboration bridges children's home and school learning experiences

Parent responses to these statements are shown in Tables 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34. The responses to the five items are all positive. Table 30 shows that 98.8% agree that home-school collaboration builds children's confidence. The remaining 1.2% are undecided and none of the respondents disagrees with the statement. Table 31 shows that 97.6% agree with the statement and the remaining 2.4% are undecided. Table 32 shows that 98.8% believe that home-school collaboration establishes trust between parents and teachers. Table 33 shows that 98.8% of the responses agree that home-school collaboration encourages parent involvement in schools and the remaining 1.2

Table 30

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 3.1

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree that home-school collaboration builds children's confidence.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	80	94.1	94.1	94.1
Agree	4	4.7	4.7	98.8
Undecided	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 31

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 3.2

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree that home-school collaboration encourages parental involvement in schools.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	71	83.5	83.5	83.5
Agree	12	14.1	14.1	97.6
Undecided	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 32

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 3.3

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree that home-school collaboration creates trust between parents and teachers.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	63	74.1	74.1	74.1
Agree	21	24.7	24.7	98.8
Undecided	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 33

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 3.4

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that home-school collaboration encourages homework support with children.)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	71	83.5	83.5	83.5
Agree	13	15.3	15.3	98.8
Undecided	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	



Table 34

## Parent Responses to Survey Statement 3.5

(Parents indicated to what degree they agree or disagree that home-school collaboration bridges the home and school learning experiences)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly agree	71	83.5	83.5	83.5
Agree	13	15.3	15.3	98.8
Undecided	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

are undecided. Table 34 shows that 98.8% agree that home-school collaboration bridges children's home and school learning experiences and the remaining 1.2% are undecided.

### Findings of Research Question 3

Parent responses to research question 3 point to strong parent support for home-school collaboration. The survey results show that Somali parents believe that helping children to develop strong self confidence is essential for their success in learning. This can be achieved only through trust and commitment which is based on collaboration between schools and parents. The results indicate that Somali parents are willing to work with the teachers of their children and the other school personnel.

The findings of this study show that parents strongly acknowledge their role as partners in education. The findings are encouraging because, as stated by Robert Sinclair (1997), when homes and schools join their efforts in providing conditions that

promote learning, academic success becomes a reality. Parents and teachers together can create conditions for effective and meaningful learning.

#### Research Question 4

What do Somali parents recommend to improve school learning conditions for their children in Ottawa high schools? This question was designed to provide parent respondents the opportunity to recommend what they think should be done to help their children succeed in learning. Eighty-five parents of the original sample of 90 responded. Each parent was asked to write three recommendations. Two hundred fifty five(255) recommendations were collected.

The recommendations were then grouped into four main categories for analysis. The categories address such areas as parent involvement, home school collaboration, staff development and curriculum reform, creation of safe school environment.

#### Parent Involvement in Schools

The first recommendation is the involvement of parents in the education of their children. The data show that the majority of the responding parents strongly recommended the involvement of parents in the education of their children. The importance of this recommendation is supported by the literature about educational renewal (Goodlad, 1979; Sinclair, 1979). These studies show that schools that made significant progress in the learning of their students, achieved this through the concerted efforts of their teachers with cooperation from parents and other community members. In addition, to teachers and parents, the creation of such environments requires the

leadership of the school principals. Recommendations for increasing the involvement of parents in their children's education is the focus of today's forums and discussions of reform minded educators. Parental involvement is an other important factor in the learning process of students. This can be achieved through strong and healthy home and school collaboration.

### Home-School Collaboration

The second recommendation made by the parents who participated in this study is the establishment of positive home and school collaboration. This recommendation is also supported by educational studies on student learning (McDermott, 1977). These studies show that both home and school environments affect how a child performs in school. The child lives in two worlds. The first is a world dominated by ethnic culture, family values and ways in which family members interact. The second is the world dominated by the norms and expectations of the school system. If the expectations of the two are different, children are caught between confusing and contradictory ideas. Children who find themselves in this situation are not expected to succeed in their learning. The recommendation made by the parents and the other educational studies mentioned above clearly indicate the importance of bridging the home and school learning environments in helping all students reach their potential. The creation of school-wide learning opportunities for all children needs cooperative efforts of the staff and other members of the school community. One way of bridging the home and the school environments is educating both parents and teachers about the importance of their togetherness in helping children.

### Staff Development and Curriculum Reform

The third recommendation made by the parents is related to staff development. Parents reported that teachers and school guidance counselors are not prepared for the challenges of today's schools. Parents recommend that teacher education programs should take into account the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student population in public schools when preparing teachers, guidance counselors and other professionals. Parents also recommend that school boards revisit the school curriculum and initiate effective reforms to meet the needs of all students. Parents also reported that the creation of safe school environment is a pre-requisite for children's learning.

### Creation of Safe School Environment

In this study "School environment" refers to the external and internal conditions that may help or hinder student learning. Parents recommended that schools, school boards, and school communities address school safety seriously. The parent recommendation is supported by the literature on effective schools. Research studies on effective schools explain the strong influence that the school environment has on the interactions among the members of the school community and how such interactions impact the effort of the school to increase student learning. Therefore, it is crucial to create an environment where all children feel safe and respected.

### Findings of Research Question 4

Unlike questions about the factors that help or hinder the education of Somali students in Ottawa high schools as perceived by their parents, and the impact of home-



school collaboration on student learning, question four was about what parents believe should be done so that all children of all families can receive equal and quality education. Parent recommendations were based on two things: First, their experiences with the teachers, counselors, and principals of the schools their children attend, second, the books and other instructional materials provided to their children. The findings gleaned from the parent recommendations regarding teachers' expectations, interactions, and behaviors towards immigrant students are consistent with the findings of the literature review.

Some research studies (Cornbleth, 1974; Dalton, 1972; Given, 1974) examined the relations among teacher expectations, their interactions with students, and student achievement. The findings of these studies clearly indicate that teachers' behaviors and their interactions with students are determined by the expectations they hold for individual students.

The findings suggest that school boards must address the following areas seriously if all children are to receive equal and quality education so they can reach their potential. These areas are: parent involvement, home school collaboration, staff development and curriculum reform, and the creation of a safe school environment.

### Summary

This chapter presented the analysis of the data obtained from the survey responses of 85 Somali parents whose children were attending Ottawa high schools. The methods used to code, analyze, and display results are also explained. Major conclusions drawn from the data analysis are described in order of the research

questions. Recommendations for improving student learning are suggested at the end of question four. The major findings and implications are summarized in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has three main purposes. First, a summary of this research study is presented. Second, conclusions concerning ways to improve school and non-school learning conditions for all children, particularly immigrant students, are discussed. Third, this chapter discusses findings, mainly focusing on the conclusions that are strongly supported by the data. Finally, recommendations for improving school and non-school learning conditions for Somali high school students in Ottawa in particular and for all students in general, recommendations for establishing constructive school-family collaboration, and recommendations for further research are advanced.

#### Summary of the Study

In the last two decades, immigration to Canada increased from about 130,000 immigrants and refugees in the 1980s to about over 200,000 in the 1990s. In addition to the increase in numbers, there has been a shift in the culture, values, and countries of origin of the immigrant and refugee population. This shift is from the traditional western European nations to African and Asian nations that account for approximately forty percent (40%) of Canada's current immigration (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1989). For example, the number of Somali immigrants and refugees in the Ottawa-Carleton region has increased from several hundred in 1986 to approximately 12,000 in 1993. As a result of this influx, there has been a steady increase in the number of immigrant and refugee students registering at the Ottawa Board of

Education. While schools have been successful in helping a significant number of these students to succeed in their learning, many are disconnected from productive learning. The difficulties experienced by many immigrant and refugee students, in spite of our increased understanding of second language acquisition and theories of learning, appear to be linked to the school and non-school learning conditions that newly arrived students experience. For example, success of student learning may depend on many factors, such as the nature of instruction we present and the learning environment we provide.

The major purpose of this study was to explore, investigate, and analyze Somali parents' perceptions of the school and non-school learning conditions that positively or negatively impact the education of their children in Ottawa high schools. An additional purpose of the study was to find out what parents suggest or recommend to improve home and school collaboration. Home-school partnership is necessary for the creation of learning environments that help all children to reach their potential.

Four specific research questions guided this study:

1. What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school learning conditions that help the Somali high school students in Ottawa who are succeeding in their learning?
2. What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school learning conditions that hinder the learning of Somali high school students in Ottawa who are at risk of failure in their learning?
3. How important do Somali parent consider home-school collaboration in helping students succeed in their learning?



4. What do Somali parents recommend to improve school and non-school learning conditions for all children?

The study was carried out in the following manner. First, a focus group of high school teachers in Ottawa was asked to list the factors that they think help Somali high students who succeed in their learning and the factors that hinder the learning of those who are at risk of failure. Second, the same question was given to a focus group of Somali high school students in Ottawa. The factors listed by the two groups were used as basis for developing a survey instrument. Four Somali educators reviewed the survey and recommended slight changes. A letter was sent to Somali community organizations in Ottawa and Somali multicultural liaison officers working with the Ottawa high schools.

The population of this study was the Somali parents whose children were attending Ottawa high schools. A sample of 90 parents, or 30 percent of the 300 estimated Somali parents whose children were in Ottawa high schools, was selected for this study. This study investigated the sample parents' perceptions of the school and non-school learning conditions that help or hinder the education of their children.

Data were collected by the researcher through a survey questionnaire. The survey was mailed to 90 participants who stated their desire to participate in the study. The participants were asked to complete a 35-item survey. Question 4 of the survey asked each participant to write three recommendations that may help to improve school and non-school learning conditions for all children. Eighty-five (85) of the ninety (90) respondent participants completed the survey and sent it back to the researcher. This was a total return of over ninety-four percent (94.4%).

A reminder letter was mailed to the remaining five participants and, after two weeks, follow-up phone calls were made. Two of the participants had moved to Toronto, but the three others did mail the questionnaires later. Since the data analysis began before the researcher received them, they were not added to the data.

Data collected from the responses of the 85 participants who returned the survey within the expected time were coded and transferred to Microsoft Excel. The data were then analyzed with SPSS statistics and displayed in tabular form. Data from the recommendations were analyzed for themes and organized by categories, such as student needs, parent involvement, staff development, curriculum reform, and safe environment.

### Summary of Findings and Implications

In the following section, the major findings and implications of each question are presented. The conclusions of this study are significant for the provision of equal and quality education to Somali and other immigrant students whose primary language is other than English. Major conclusions drawn from the data analysis are described in order of the research questions.

#### Findings for Research Question #1

What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school learning conditions that help the Somali high school students in Ottawa who are succeeding in their learning? The results of the data analysis show that differences do exist between parents' and teachers' expectations and understandings of what constitutes appropriate

homework support. These differences may indicate lack of effective communication and collaboration between Somali parents and the teachers of their children. However, the majority of the parents reported that home and school cooperation and open communication between parents and school personnel are crucial for creating meaningful learning environments for all students.

### Findings for Research Question #2

What do Somali parents consider to be the school and non-school learning conditions that hinder the learning of Somali high school students in Ottawa who at risk of failure in their learning? The perceptions of Somali parents regarding what they consider to be the learning conditions that hinder the learning of their children in Ottawa high schools are generally the same.

The findings gleaned from the data analysis of the parent responses to the 14 survey statements of question two indicate that parents consider the following to be the main factors that hinder the learning of the Somali high school students who are not succeeding in their learning:

1. Direct and indirect harassment in schools. In response to this item of the survey, 45 parents, 52.9% of the total sample of 85, stated that their children experience direct and indirect harassment in the schools they attend. The responses are consistent with the findings of Graham's 1988 Youth Needs Assessment. Graham's study reported that minority students stated discrimination, discouragement, and racism in schools are among the problems they face that impede their academic success.

Another study of Needs Assessment of high risk Somali Youth (Ali, 1995) found that direct and indirect harassment in schools are among the major problems Somali students encounter in high schools.

2. Inappropriate books and other instructional materials. The majority of the responding parents (88.2%) reported that school books and other instructional materials are culturally biased and do not reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the student population in Ottawa public schools.
3. Counselors' insensitivity to the individual needs of immigrant students. As shown by Table 10, more than fifty (50%) percent of the respondents reported that school guidance counselors are either insensitive to or lack the knowledge or understanding of different cultural backgrounds, different learning styles, and ways of thinking and goal setting. All of these are cultural related and could impact student learning. Insensitivity to diversity issues on the part of school counselors may lead to serious conflicts.
4. Ineffective ESL programs. The results of this study show that parents understand that ESL is very important for immigrant students to grasp the language and progress in their studies. However, they are concerned about its effectiveness in terms of content, and appropriateness in helping students advance to mainstream classes.

The overall data show that parents disagree with what the teachers consider to be the major factors that hinder the academic success of Somali high school students. On the other hand, parents either agree with or have too little or no information to make a



decision about the factors identified by their children. For example, parent responses are split when it comes to teachers' attitudes towards immigrant students, different treatment of immigrant students by teachers, and lack of teachers' appraisal and feedback.

### Findings for Research Question #3

How important do Somali parent see home-school collaboration in helping students succeed in their learning? Parent responses to research question 3 point to strong parent support for home-school collaboration. The survey results show that Somali parents believe that helping children to develop strong self-confidence is essential for their success in learning. This can only be achieved through trust and commitment based on collaboration between schools and parents. The results indicate that Somali parents are willing to work with the teachers of their children and the other school personnel.

The findings of this study show that parents strongly acknowledge their role as partners in education. The findings are encouraging because, as stated by Robert Sinclair (1997), when homes and schools join their efforts in providing conditions that promote learning, academic success becomes a reality. Parents and teachers together can create conditions for effective and meaningful learning. The results of this study indicate that Somali parents understand the importance of home-school cooperation in establishing safe and conducive learning environments for all children.

#### Findings for Research Question #4

What do Somali parents recommend to improve school and non-school learning conditions for all children? Unlike questions about the factors that help or hinder the education of Somali students in Ottawa high schools as perceived by their parents, and the impact of home-school collaboration on student learning, question 4 was about what parents believe should be done so that all children of all families receive equal and quality education. Parent recommendations were based on three things: First, their experiences with the teachers, counselors, and principals of the schools their children attend; second, the books and other instructional materials provided to their children; third, information they receive from their children. The findings gleaned from the parent recommendations regarding improving school and non-school learning conditions for all children were categorized into four main groups for analysis. The categories address such areas as parent involvement, home school collaboration, staff development and curriculum reform, creation of safe school environment.

#### Recommendations

The recommendations are organized as follows. First, recommendations for parent involvement in schools are presented. Second, recommendations for establishing constructive school-family collaboration are proposed. Third, recommendations for improvement of school personnel preparation and curriculum reform are suggested. Fourth, recommendations for the creation of safe school environments are proposed. Finally, based on both the limitations and the results of this study, recommendations for further research are advanced.

## Parent Involvement in Schools

The first recommendation is the involvement of parents in the education of their children. The data show that the majority of the responding parents strongly recommended the involvement of parents in the education of their children. The importance of this recommendation is supported by the literature about educational renewal (Goodlad, 1979; Sinclair, 1979). These studies show that schools that made significant progress in the learning of their students achieved this through the concerted efforts of their teachers with cooperation from parents and other community members. In addition to teachers and parents, the creation of such environments requires the leadership of the school principals. Recommendations for increasing the involvement of parents in their children's education are the focus of today's forums and the discussions of reform-minded educators. Parental involvement is another important factor in the learning process of students. This can be achieved through strong and healthy home and school collaboration.

## Home-School Collaboration

The second recommendation made by the parents who participated in this study is the establishment of positive home and school collaboration. This recommendation is also supported by educational studies on student learning (McDermott, 1977), which show that both home and school environments affect how a child performs in school. The child lives in two worlds. The first is a world dominated by ethnic culture, family values, and ways in which family members interact. The second is the world dominated by the norms and expectations of the school system. If the expectations of the two are

different, children are caught between confusing and contradictory ideas. Children who find themselves in this situation are not expected to succeed in their learning.

The recommendation made by the parents and the other educational studies mentioned above clearly state the importance of bridging the home and school learning environments in helping all students reach their potential. The creation of school-wide learning opportunities for all children requires cooperative efforts of the staff and other members of the school community. One way of bridging the home and school environments is educating both parents and teachers about the importance of their togetherness in helping children.

#### Staff Development and Curriculum Reform

The third recommendation made by the parents is related to staff development. Parents reported that teachers and school guidance counselors are not prepared for the challenges of today's schools. Parents recommend that teacher education programs should take into account the cultural and ethnic diversity of student population in public schools when preparing teachers, guidance counselors, and other professionals. Parents also recommend that school boards should revisit the school curriculum and initiate effective reforms to meet the needs of all students. Parents also reported that creation of a safe school environment is a pre-requisite for children's learning.

#### Creation of Safe School Environment

As used in this study, "school environment" refers to the external and internal conditions that may help or hinder student learning. Parents recommended that schools,



school boards, and school communities address school safety seriously. The parent recommendation is supported by the literature on effective schools. Research studies on effective schools explain the strong influence that the school environment has on the interactions among the members of the school community and how that impacts the efforts of the school to increase student learning. Therefore, it is crucial to create an environment where all children feel safe and respected.

### Recommendations

This final section of this chapter offers recommendations based on the findings of the study. These recommendations are of three types. First, recommendations are proposed for the improvement of this study. Second, recommendations for further research are suggested. Finally, recommendations for improving student learning are advanced.

#### Recommendations for the Improvement of this Study

Some problems were encountered in conducting this study. The study was limited to the parents whose children attended Ottawa high schools at the time of this study. It was not feasible to extend the study to other areas outside of the capital region due to limited resources and time. Other problems included lack of any organized list of Somali parents whose children were in high schools. Lists from Somali Organizations, settlement agencies, and others, such as Ottawa Housing, were collected. The collected lists of Somali parents were compared and checked to avoid multiple use of names that

might have been included in more than one list. Once a final list was made, problems of identifying current mailing addresses surfaced.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for further research fall into several critical areas that may encourage the improvement of the learning conditions for immigrant students both in school and non-school settings.

1. Since this study was limited to the Somali parents' perceptions about the factors that help or hinder the education of their children in Ottawa high schools, further study is needed to find out whether Somali parents whose children attend primary schools share similar perceptions.
2. Further research is needed to examine the appropriateness of the professional preparation programs for teachers, administrators, and specifically for guidance counselors, given the realities of public schools.
3. Further research is needed with respect to how schools involve immigrant parents in the education of their children.
4. Further research is needed to find out the teachers' and principals' perceptions of the major problems that hinder the learning of immigrant students, and the best ways in which school boards and local schools could identify and address these problems, so that all children may reach their potential.

## Recommendations for Improving Student Learning

A fundamental purpose of public schools in a democratic society should be to provide quality educational opportunities to all children, regardless of race, gender, income, or prior educational achievement. Not only are schools expected to initiate and develop comprehensive educational programs and activities that lead to the successful achievement of academic, social, personal, and career goals, but new Canadians also expect schools to lead the efforts towards social justice in a society that is under constant demographic change. To achieve this purpose, schools have the responsibility of developing programs that help children and provide them with the opportunity to learn well.

The findings of this study have significant implications for improving student learning. Student learning is central to any meaningful school improvement efforts. Contrary to the national, provincial, and system wide approaches to reforming education from the top down, research studies on school improvements (Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Sinclair, 1979; Tyler, 1986; Washington, 1980) indicate that successful improvement efforts do begin in local schools. These educators perceive improvement of public schools as a school-by-school process that mainly depends on curriculum reform, as well as the knowledge, ability, and commitment of school personnel to create appropriate learning environments for all children.

The findings of this study confirm the findings of previous studies on student learning. There is no single way to solve the challenges students face in their learning, but there are many ways to approach addressing these challenges when educators recognize that students are the most important people in schools. This means each

school must create the conditions necessary for improved student learning by revisiting the existing learning environments and redesigning them to meet the needs of the student population the school serves. Improving student learning should be central to educational reform. The findings of this study indicate that improving student learning demands the improvement of student evaluations, professional development of personnel, curriculum reform, and the link of schools to student homes and the school community at large.

#### Professional Development of School Personnel

The second recommendation made by the parents is related to staff development. Parents reported that teachers and school guidance counselors are not prepared for the challenges of today's schools. Parents recommend that teacher education programs should take into account the cultural and ethnic diversity of student population in public schools when preparing teachers, guidance counselors, and other professionals. Parents also recommend that school boards should revisit the school curriculum and initiate effective reforms to meet the needs of all students. Parents also reported that creation of safe school environment is pre-requisite for children's learning.

#### Linking Schools to Student Homes

The third recommendation made by the parents who participated in this study is the establishment of positive home and school collaboration. This recommendation is also supported by educational studies on student learning (McDermott, 1977). These studies show that both home and school environments affect how a child performs in



school. The child lives in two worlds. The first is a world dominated by ethnic culture, family values and ways in which family members interact. The second is the world dominated by the norms and expectations of the school system. If the expectations of the two are different, children are caught between confusing and contradicting ideas. Children who find themselves in this situation are not expected to succeed in their learning. The recommendation made by the parents and the other educational studies mentioned above, clearly states the importance of bridging the home and school learning environments in helping all students reach their potential. The creation of school-wide learning opportunities for all children requires cooperative efforts among the staff and other members of the school community. One way of bridging the home and school environments is educating both parents and teachers about the importance of their togetherness in helping children.

### Closing

Many Somali high school students in Ottawa experience difficulty in learning despite our increased understanding of second language acquisition, individual differences in learning, and the importance of parent involvement in the education of their children. These students continue to have a high dropout rate. As the immigrant student population continues to increase, so will the challenges that accompany the need to provide equal educational opportunities for all students. Many factors that contribute to these difficulties are associated with the school and non-school learning environments that these students experience.

Creating effective learning environments for all children is not an easy task. It requires committed school personnel who motivate children and help them to achieve self confidence and interest in what our schools expect children to learn. In addition, constructive partnership between schools and homes is key to connecting school and home learning experiences.

The present study contributes to the understanding of Somali parents' perceptions of the factors that positively or negatively affect the education of their children in Ottawa high schools. Further, the study examines the parents' view of the impact of home-school collaboration on children's confidence, parent involvement in schools, trust between parents and teachers, homework support with children, and the connection between home and school learning experiences. Additionally, parents were asked to write recommendations for improving school learning conditions for all children.

Data indicated that Somali parents are highly concerned about the social/emotional support that their children receive from guidance counselors. While parents acknowledge that many teachers are committed to helping all children of all families succeed, they expressed that there are some teachers who discourage students from reaching their potential. An important finding of this study is the universal feeling among all parents that they are willing to work with teachers and other school personnel so that home and school learning environments are conducive to student needs.

APPENDIX A  
A LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

## LETTER TO PARTICIPANT CANDIDATES

7 Mortimer Private  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1Z 1A6

(name)  
(address)

Dear (name)

I am Mohamed F. Good, a doctoral candidate in the program of Curriculum Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. I am doing research to get data for my Doctoral Dissertation. The title of the dissertation is Somali Parents' Perceptions of the Factors Impacting the Education of Somali high students in Ottawa Public Schools.

The research which is done in cooperation with the National Coalition for Equality in Learning focuses on the factors that help or hinder the education of Somali high school students in Ottawa Public Schools as perceived by the Somali Parents. The instruments used for data collection will be questionnaires written in English and Somali that will be mailed to each parent participant. Confidentiality will be assured. Neither your name, your address, names of people close to you, nor the school of your child/children will be used. In case of specific data, I will use codes that in no way relate to you or to your child/children's institution.

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate. I look forward to talking to you when the questionnaires are ready to be mailed. Thank you again

Sincerely,

Mohamed F. Good



APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORM

## Participant Consent Form

I, Mohamed F. Good, am a doctoral student at the School of Education, University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts. I am conducting a study for my dissertation that will explore the parents' perceptions of the factors that impact the education of Somali high students in Ottawa public schools.

You are asked to be a participant in this study because you are one of the parents whose children are in Ottawa public schools. The data will be gathered by means of a questionnaire.

Your participation is voluntary. Therefore, you are free to participate or not to participate without prejudice. Also your decision to participate or not to participate will no way affect you or your child/children. If you choose to participate, you will be one of approximately 90 parents completing the questionnaire forms. The data obtained from the responses of the questionnaire will be categorized with the final objective of analyzing the material for.

- \* My dissertation
- \* A possible journal article
- \* Presentations and workshops to groups interested in providing quality education programs for immigrant students in Canadian public schools.

In all written materials and oral presentations in which I will use the data from the questionnaires, I will use neither your name, names of people close to you, nor the name of your child's school. In case of specific data, I will use codes to participants, and children's schools.

You may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time. Also, you may review your data any time. If I am to use the data provided in any other way not consistent with the above mentioned objectives, I will contact you to get your additional consent.

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above statements and agree to participate in this study under the conditions stated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C

### INSTRUCTION TO PARENT PERCEPTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

SOMALI PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FACTORS IMPACTING THE  
EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN IN OTTAWA HIGH SCHOOLS

PARENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY

Dear Parent:

Thank you for helping with this important research. The following survey is designed to find out your perceptions of the factors that impact the education of your child/children attending Ottawa High Schools. Your answers to the following questions will help teachers, principals, trustees, and other administrators and educators of the Ottawa Board of education to improve the school learning conditions and find out ways to work with parents to address the crucial school and non-school factors that affect student learning.

Your participation in the survey is voluntary, and your responses are completely confidential. Please note that there are no right or wrong responses to the questions. I appreciate your help in completing this survey.

Please place the completed questionnaire in the provided stamped and self addressed envelope and mail. Again, thank you for all your help.

Sincerely,

Mohamed F. Good  
Project Assistant  
National Coalition for Equality in Learning  
School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



APPENDIX D

PARENT PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE

## PARENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY (PPS)

I. Personal Information      II. Parent Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the category that fits your profile.

A. Gender:

1. male \_\_\_\_\_ 2. female \_\_\_\_\_

B. Marital Status:

1. Single \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Married \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Separated \_\_\_\_\_

4. Divorce \_\_\_\_\_ 5. widowed \_\_\_\_\_

C. Education:

1. None \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Elementary \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Intermediate \_\_\_\_\_

4. Secondary \_\_\_\_\_ 5. College \_\_\_\_\_ 6. University \_\_\_\_\_

D. Number of Years in Canada:

0-2 \_\_\_\_\_ 2-5 \_\_\_\_\_ 5-10 \_\_\_\_\_ More than 10 years \_\_\_\_\_

E. Number of your children in Ottawa High Schools:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 6 or more \_\_\_\_\_

F. Gender of your child/children

Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

G. Grade level of your child

G9 \_\_\_\_\_ G10 \_\_\_\_\_ G11 \_\_\_\_\_ G12 \_\_\_\_\_ G13 \_\_\_\_\_

H. Employment

Employed \_\_\_\_\_ Self employed \_\_\_\_\_ Unemployed \_\_\_\_\_

### Instructions to the Survey

Below are statements of possible factors that may affect positively or negatively the education of your child/children in Ottawa Public Schools. Please indicate if you Strongly Agree (1) Agree(2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Disagree(4) Strongly Disagree (5) with each statement, by circling the number that corresponds with your position.

1= Strongly agree

2= Agree

3= Neither agree nor disagree

4= Disagree

5= Strongly disagree

-----  
Q.1. School and non-school conditions that help students to succeed in their learning.  
-----

1. My child/children is/are motivated by school teachers.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. My child/children is/are treated like every other child.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. My child/children is/are provided safe environment in school.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. My child/children is/are provided equal access to learning opportunities.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. My child/children is/are supported with their homework at home.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. My child/children has/have clear future goals.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7. My child/children has/have good attendance record.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. My child/children receive appraisal and feedback from teachers.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. My child/children is/are given a clear idea of what is to be learned.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. School guidance counselors are sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences of students.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. School books reflect the cultural diversity of the student population.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

12. My child/children has/have realistic view of his/her/their own abilities.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

13. My child/children realizes/realize the importance of reading and writing.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

14. My child/children can handle regular program without ESL help.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

15. My child/children is/are in ESL classes.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

-----  
Q.2. School and non-school conditions that hinder student learning.  
-----

1. My child/children is/are discouraged by teachers' attitudes towards his/her/their ability/abilities

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. My child/children is/are treated differently

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. My child/children is/are subjected to direct and indirect harassment in school.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. My child/children is/are denied equal access

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. My child/children has/have no support with homework

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. My child/children has/have no clear future goals

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

7. My child/children's school attendance is weak

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. My child/children receives/receive no appraisal and feedback from teachers.



1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. Books and instructional materials do not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student population.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. School guidance counselors are not sensitive to the individual needs of different students.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. My child/children has/have no realistic view of his/her/their ability.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

12. Prior educational background affects negatively the performance of my child/children.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

13. Extra responsibility at home prevents my child/children from concentrating on his/her/their school work.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

14. My child/children is/are in ESL

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

15. My child/children does/do not realize the importance of reading and writing skills.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

-----  
Q.3. The importance of home-school collaboration in helping students succeed in their learning.  
-----

1. Home-school collaboration builds children's confidence.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. Home-school collaboration encourages parental involvement in schools

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. Home-school collaboration creates trust between Parents and teachers

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. Home-school collaboration encourages homework support with children

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. Home-school collaboration connects the home and school learning experiences

1	2	3	4	5
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Q.4. Parents recommendations for improving school learning conditions for all children.  
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For question # 4, please list three suggestions that you think would improve school learning conditions for your child/children in Ottawa high schools.

Recommendation 1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E

THANK YOU LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

## THANK YOU LETTER TO PARENTS

7 Mortimer Private  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1Z 1A6  
August 1996

<Title> <First> <Last>  
<Address>  
<City,Province>

Dear <First>,

Thank you for completing the questionnaires for my dissertation titled " Somali Parents' Perceptions of the Factors Impacting the Education of their Children in Ottawa high schools." Your ideas about the factors that impact the education of Somali high school students in Ottawa public schools help not only the completion of this study, but also the provision of appropriate learning experiences to all students by the educators at the different levels of the Ottawa board of education. Parents are a powerful voice in educational change and improvement.

The data collection portion of my research is now complete. Because of your assistance and that of other parents, I have the responses from 85 parents. This information will be organized and analyzed during December 1996 and January 1997. When my work is complete, I will send you a copy of my report.

Again, thank you for your time and thoughtful responses. My warmest wishes to you and your family.

Sincerely,

Mohamed F. Good



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